

**CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY**

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

**OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR**

MORI c03235367

29 March 1972

**MEMORANDUM FOR: The Members, NSC Indochina Ad Hoc Group****SUBJECT : White House Request for an Assessment of North Vietnamese Strategy over the Next Six Months**

Attached for your consideration are first drafts of the two papers requested by the White House:

- (a) Assessment of Probable North Vietnamese Military Strategy over the Next Six Months
- (b) Assessment of Probable North Vietnamese Political Strategy over the Next Six Months

The drafts are rough because of the speed with which they were put together. They are offered as points of departure for your comments, criticism, and additions.

OSD, ARMY review  
completed*L.A. 2.*

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## ASSESSMENT OF PROBABLE NORTH VIETNAMESE MILITARY STRATEGY OVER THE NEXT SIX MONTHS

### Overview

1.

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The focus of this effort is likely to be in the

rugged western parts of Military Regions (MR s) 1 and 2 in South Vietnam, where large numbers of well-equipped Communist troops are already arrayed. In southern South Vietnam, an expansion of terrorism and guerrilla activity is possible, but extensive Communist main force action seems unlikely unless the Saigon government moves enough of its troops north to MRs 1 and 2 to present Hanoi with an exploitable opportunity.

2. The Communists are also likely to continue the current offensive in northern Laos through the end of the dry season unless they secure the Long Tieng area before then. Southern Laos, by contrast, will probably see only limited activity designed to protect Hanoi's logistic network from any possible ground threat. Extensive main force activity in Cambodia looks unlikely given the extent to which Communist forces have been re-targetted against South Vietnam. In Laos and particularly in Cambodia, however, the Communists are almost certain to mount terrorist activities

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especially when they want to unsettle the local government or feel themselves in need of headlines.

Timing

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4. For maximum impact, it is likely that the Communists would in fact like to attack more or less simultaneously in MR 1 and MR 2. In MR 2 they still have time before the rains begin in May to mount a major attack against Kontum or Pleiku cities; at the least they would hope to give ARVN a highly visible bloodying. After the rainy season gets under way, they might return the 320th Division to North Vietnam, but it seems just as likely that they will keep their force structure in and near the highlands at something like its present level.

5. Farther north, the Communists now have a new road on the east side of the mountains, and they will probably use it to keep on fighting in MR 1 through the summer. In both MR 1 and MR 2, they will be trying to bring unprecedentedly heavy firepower to bear on their adversaries. Elsewhere in South Vietnam, the goal of their main force units will be to tie down as many South Vietnamese troops as possible and to test for weaknesses, probably in a fairly cautious way. 25X1

A "Spontaneous Uprising?"

7. Broadly speaking, the Communists probably have three interrelated objectives in this period: To undermine ARVN's self-confidence and its credibility with the populace, and thereby to reduce the effectiveness of the pacification program; to influence U.S. domestic politics, particularly the election campaign; and to stimulate pressure in both South Vietnam and the U.S. for a negotiated settlement on something approaching the Communists' terms. Hanoi may also be harboring grander hopes--for a military victory so smashing as to undermine the Saigon regime, for instance, or for a significant surge of popular unrest. The Communists probably do not, however, consider such events particularly likely. They almost certainly have ruled out an all-or-nothing operation along the lines of the 1968 offensives, and they probably are prepared to live with the possibility that they will achieve no more than fairly modest gains in the next six months.

Enemy Capabilities: Manpower and Disposition of Forces

8. This judgment of the enemy's objectives fits his capabilities quite well. Conscription in North Vietnam has been high over the past year, with large numbers of young men being inducted into the NVA to replace the troops sent to fight beyond the borders of North Vietnam. Thus far this dry season (i.e., from 1 October 1971 to 25 March 1972), Hanoi has dispatched about 117,000 infiltrators to the southern war zones. This compares with some 106,200 during the entire dry season last year (1970-

1971). Since the infiltration flow in most dry seasons has almost ceased by the end of March, we may have seen the bulk of the infiltration this spring already. Infiltrators beginning the trek from the north after March would generally arrive in the south at the end of the campaigning season, and rain comes to the Lao Panhandle in May--making travel more difficult. Furthermore, combat losses have not been heavy during the dry season campaigning to date, and thus the need for late-season infiltrators as replacements is not great. (This could change, of course, if large scale military action gets under way in coming weeks.)

9. Infiltration starts, by destination, compare as follows:

	<u>1970/71</u> (Oct 70-May 71)	<u>1971/72</u> (Oct 71-25 Mar 72)
GVN MRs 1 and 2		
DMZ-Tri Thien-Hue	6,000	12,000
MR 5	14,000	16,000
B-3 Front	14,500	40,000
GVN MRs 3 and 4 and Cambodia		
COSVN	45,000	35,000
South Laos	26,500	14,000
Total	<u>106,200</u>	<u>117,000</u>

As the infiltration figures indicate, the NVA threat to MRs 1 and 2 has developed more strongly than to MRs 3 and 4. The estimate for the B-3 Front includes the 320th Division. The figure for the DMZ and the

## TABLE 1

Estimated Strength  
of Communist Regular Combat Forces  
in Indochina

	(Thousand)			
	<u>December 1969</u>	<u>December 1970</u>	<u>December 1971</u>	<u>March 1972</u>
VC/NVA	<u>130-150</u>	<u>105-120</u>	<u>105-120</u>	<u>140-155</u>
South Vietnam a/	130-150	85-95	80-90	110-120
Cambodia	-	20-25	25-30	30-35
Khmer Communist	<u>N.A.</u>	<u>10-20</u>	<u>15-30</u>	<u>15-30</u>
PL/NVA	<u>55-65</u>	<u>60-70</u>	<u>70-85</u>	<u>70-85</u>
Northern Laos	35-40	30-35	40-45	40-45
Southern Laos	20-25	30-35	30-40	30-40

a. Figures for South Vietnam include those NVA forces located in southern North Vietnam between Dong Hoi and the DMZ which are considered to be a threat to South Vietnam. These forces numbered 13,000 in December 1969, 10,000 in December 1970, 12,000 in December 1971 and 20,000 in March 1972.

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10. We estimate that this year's infiltration has provided for an expansion of the VC/NVA combat order of battle (OB) in South Vietnam and Cambodia by about 27,000 men, increasing the combat OB from about 69,000 to 91,000 in South Vietnam and providing for a 5,000-man increase to COSVN's concentration of forces in Cambodia opposite GVN MR 3. <sup>(See Table 1)</sup> The remaining 90,000 infiltrators have been used to expand the rear services system in South Laos and Cambodia and provide a stock of fillers to offset combat casualties.

11. It seems clear from the manpower situation that Hanoi has committed a large portion of its military assets this year to the various military fronts outside North Vietnam. As a result of (a) this year's infiltration, (b) the recent unit deployments into South Vietnam, and (c) an earlier expansion of the force structure in North Laos, there will remain in North Vietnam only 17 regular infantry regiments.\* This is the smallest reserve force kept at home by Hanoi during any dry season since 1968 when the General Offensive was underway. In addition, there is some

\* This assumes that the 308th Division, which at the moment is still in North Vietnam, is committed to redeploy to South Vietnam.



question concerning the combat capability of some of these reserve regiments.

12. This willingness of Hanoi to move an increasing proportion of its troops to areas outside North Vietnam has led to some change in the comparative enemy-versus-friendly combat strengths in South Vietnam. As can be seen from the following tabulation, GVN Main Forces still enjoy superiority in all Military Regions, but that superiority is significantly greater in MRs 3 and 4 than in MRs 1 and 2.

Main Force Ratios (Allied/VC/NVA) a/

	<u>MR 1</u>	<u>MR 2</u>	<u>MR 3</u>	<u>MR 4</u>	<u>SVN</u>
1968	2.4	3.3	3.9	2.4	2.9
1970	2.7	7.0	4.5	8.3	4.3
1972	1.9	2.4	19.5 (3.3) <u>b/</u>	7.4	3.7 (2.9) <u>b/</u>

a. The figures are a ratio of aggregate maneuver battalion strength. They include U.S. forces for 1968 and 1970 only, and in 1972 they include the GVN's Regional Force battalions. The ratios also reflect a maximum NVA buildup concept, including in 1972 the 308th Division. The ARVN side of the ratio for MRs 1 and 2 also includes the planned deployment of the remaining Marines and Airborne out of the reserves.

b. The figures in parentheses result from the inclusion of COSVN's 5th, 7th, and 9th Divisions, which are targetted against South Vietnam but are presently in Cambodia near the GVN MR 3 border.

13. To the extent Hanoi's strategy considerations are based on its manpower commitments (and its judgments regarding allied strengths), MRs 1 and 2 continue to seem the most likely candidates for enemy-initiated

NVA should launch such an offensive, fighting would be heavy and casualties high. Casualties would be particularly high for the NVA, however, which is the offensive force and which is highly vulnerable--when its units are concentrated--to Allied firepower. Although local situations might develop that appeared desperate, the South Vietnamese forces in MRs 1 and 2 should be capable of protecting themselves and the populated areas of the region, and of retaking any key objectives lost in the opening round of NVA attacks. (This assessment is consistent with the views held by most senior South Vietnamese commanders.)

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15. Hanoi's military strategy in the southern MRs themselves is closely related to its strategy in Cambodia. The North Vietnamese in Cambodia have attempted to create a situation in which Khmer Communist units, along with certain NVA regiments which have been converted into territorial-type light units, are strong enough on their own to hamstring the Cambodian army. This would free the regular North Vietnamese and Viet Cong main force units--which we designate as "mobile regulars"--to put pressure on GVN MR 3 and MR 4. Hanoi's objective is to tie down as many

GVN forces in MRs 3 and 4 as possible. Hanoi will doubtless also seek to expand terrorist and sapper activity to the extent possible in both Cambodia and South Vietnam in furtherance of this objective. Given the ratio of opposing main forces, however, it is unlikely that the VC/NVA can bring off any striking successes in southern South Vietnam in the next six months.

16. Hanoi also sharply increased its commitment of forces to the war in North Laos this season. Heavy infiltration toward the end of 1971 included the deployment of three infantry regiments, improvements in the air ~~and~~ defense system, and increases in heavy artillery. By the end of 1971, the NVA enjoyed a combat force superiority of about 2.5 to 1 over the Meo irregulars, Thais, and Lao regular army (FAR) personnel in the Plaine des Jarres area.

17. Hanoi's intention this season was to secure the Plaine des Jarres area by taking friendly strong points to the south, including Long Tieng, and to destroy the remaining effectiveness of Vang Pao's army. The growing participation of Thai troops was probably one factor in Hanoi's decision to try for a major breakthrough in North Laos this year. At this point, it is not yet clear whether NVA forces have steam enough to complete the job of taking Long Tieng and associated areas. Because it is now late in the dry season, Hanoi probably will be unable to precipitate a major political crisis in Vientiane, even if the NVA should be successful against

Enemy Logistics

18. The overall picture of the Communists' logistical activity during the past several months matches that of their military manpower commitment. Unusually heavy levels of resupply have been detected in South Laos and along the Cambodian and South Vietnam frontiers--particularly the borders of MR 1 and MR 2. In North Laos the enemy's offensive, now several months along, continues to receive substantial logistics support.

19. Currently, supply stockpiles in North Vietnam are extensive. Petroleum stocks in southern North Vietnam may be as high as 40,000 tons (the enemy's entire dry season POL requirement in southern Laos is only on the order of 15,000 to 20,000 tons) and the current inventory of trucks is the highest ever.

20. Logistics-related construction continues to complement the buildup in stocks in North Vietnam. Two new airfields are under construction in southern North Vietnam which when completed--probably this summer--will bring to six the number of airfields south of the 20th Parallel capable of handling jet aircraft. A major new north-south road system is also being constructed. Segments extend from the Vinh area southward some 150 miles to within 17 miles of the DMZ. New construction extending the railroad south of Vinh to within a few miles of Mu Gia Pass, and new pipeline construction to connect Hanoi with the pipeline systems in the North Vietnamese and Laotian Panhandles is also underway.

Supply Movements This Dry Season

21. The Communist's annual dry season "General Transportation Offensive" in southern Laos got into high gear in early January and has continued unabated to the present.\* Facilitated by a considerable road construction effort and restructured logistic apparatus, large quantities of supplies have been moved from North Vietnam through the Laotian Panhandle into Cambodia and South Vietnam. A new road system has been built through the central Laos Panhandle; more than 100 miles of new roads are being constructed in northeastern Cambodia; four new roads are under construction through the DMZ into South Vietnam; and a series of new roads is being built south of the

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\* The area has now entered the transitional weather phase preceding the rainy southwest monsoon season which starts usually in May. Thus far, however, weather has not yet affected the road system which remains in generally excellent condition.

tri-border area, presumably to support troop deployments in the Central Highlands of South Vietnam.

22. The level of logistic activity noted in the southernmost part of the Laos Panhandle has been particularly impressive this dry season. For example, as the General Transportation Offensive began in January, Binh Tram 35 in the Ban Bac area reportedly delivered some 3,500 short tons (an average of 113 short tons daily) of supplies during the month -- probably the largest monthly total ever detected moving that far south.\* Besides these heavy southward deliveries, large quantities of supplies also have been detected moving eastward toward South Vietnam. Binh Tram 42 reported the delivery of 102 tons daily to GVN MR 1 on seven days in late January. Similarly, Binh Tram 37 revealed an average supply flow of some 64 tons daily to the B-3 Front in early February, while at the same time maintaining a significant flow of supplies south to Binh Trams in northeastern Cambodia. A northward flow of supplies -- chiefly rice -- has also been maintained in the tri-border area. The rice is delivered through

\* Previous record levels of supply deliveries in the southern Panhandle were reached during February and March of 1970 when Binh Tram 35 reported receiving an average of 107 tons of supplies daily. Comparing the two, the 113 STPD figure for January 1972 represents Binh Tram 35's deliveries farther south (not receipts from the North) well before the normal peak levels of activity in February-March.

the northern Cambodia logistical network to Binh Tram 37 which distributes it among units in the southern part of the Panhandle and also moves it to the east along supply routes to South Vietnam.

23. Massive quantities of arms and ammunition have been included in the detected supply deliveries. For example, Binh Tram 45 shipped some 2,800 tons of ordnance to Binh Tram 46 along the new central road system during February. The shipments included virtually every category of weapon and ammunition known to be in the North Vietnamese inventory and represent the largest monthly shipment of munitions ever noted in COMINT in southern Laos. This high level of activity along the central corridor has continued into March. A summary report for the period 1-12 March indicated that 1,650 tons of supplies, -- roughly half arms and ammunition -- were moved between Binh Trams 45 and 46.

24. This heavy supply activity in the southern Panhandle has had a dual impact. First, activity on the exit corridors has resulted in supply throughput to South Vietnam and Cambodia this season being considerably higher than that of last year at this time. Secondly, this performance has allowed the Communists to augment their stockpiles of supplies, particularly of arms and

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\* While throughput has been at high levels, one anomaly exists in the intelligence available for evaluating the dry season effort. The level of supply input into southern Laos as detected by sensors is running well below that recorded last year. Several factors could explain this:

- Resupply requirements may be considerably smaller this year than last when the enemy was building very large supply stockpiles in anticipation of and defense against the ARVN operations.
- Required inputs from North Vietnam may be lower this year because of concentrated efforts by the Communists to achieve greater self-sufficiency in rice in south Laos and northern South Vietnam. Supplementing this is a probably increased flow of rice from Cambodia to southern Laos and South Vietnam, a flow which should conceptually be considered "input".
- The extensive expansion of the South Laos/Cambodia logistic system probably required levels of supply input which are currently unnecessary. With that system now operating more efficiently it presumably requires less input from the north for its own consumption.
- The Communists may be moving large



Northeast Cambodia

25. Resupply activity in northeast Cambodia this dry season has tracked closely with that in South Laos. Traffic levels on the overland corridor (Route 110/97) increased markedly in January and by mid-February had surged to moderate rates between the border and Stung Treng. South of Stung Treng, sizable volumes of ordnance supplies have continued to be shipped southward via the Mekong and Route 13 to Kratie, thence to enemy strongholds on either side of the Mekong. At the same time, the Communists have sustained a large flow of rice and gasoline north for consumption by enemy forces in the Northeast, the southern part of the Laotian Panhandle, and in the B-3 Front area of South Vietnam. Concurrent with the large troop buildup in the B-3 Front area, enemy engineers have constructed a series of new motorable roads and related facilities in the area. The latest reports from aerial observers reveal that the roadnet will apparently

\* Continued from page 5

quantities of supplies stockpiled in the northern and central Panhandle last year forward toward South Vietnam and Cambodia this year.

-- Finally, our sensor data on input may be incomplete.

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link Base Areas 609 and 702 and also will provide a direct link to the Stung Treng military complex.

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#### North Laos

27. The Communist dry season supply effort in northern Laos got into full swing well ahead of that in the Laos Panhandle. By September, extensive road work was underway and some resupply activity apparent, and by early November very large quantities of supplies -- particularly arms and ammunition -- were on their way to Communist forces who would launch the Communist dry season offensive in the Plaine des Jarres area. The results of this effort have been impressive: an evaluation of intercepted enemy communications suggests that the North Vietnamese have delivered 30% to 50% more supplies this dry season than ever before during a comparable period. Although the

pace of supply activity has now slowed from its peak period of November through January, there is ample evidence that significant deliveries -- possibly including 40 to 50 tons daily of ammunition -- have continued over the past two months.

28 While continuing a high level of supply deliveries, the Communists also have greatly upgraded their logistical and tactical capability in northern Laos by constructing a major new supply route west of the Plaine. Now motorable to within a few miles of the Long Tieng Valley, this road gives the Communists for the first time a motorable supply route by which to supply forces west of the Plaine. Through its use the Communist posture for pressing the assault on the Long Tieng complex is greatly enhanced.

#### Outlook for the Wet Season

29 Overall, the Communists' current logistic posture appears to be in its best shape of the past two years: their stockpiles -- especially of arms and ammunition -- appear sizable; their route structure has gained further redundancy and capability; and, they are capable of supporting a record level of rainy season activity, both across the DMZ and in the Laos/Cambodia border area. Finally, these developments will give them a stronger

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logistics posture in the early stages of the 1972-73 dry season than they had this dry season.

30 All signs indicate that the Communists will sustain a relatively high level of logistic activity over the next two months. By June, however, the seasonal monsoons will affect the road network in south Laos and Cambodia and the level of activity will be sharply curtailed. During the summer, when rains are heaviest, the focus of activity throughout most of the Panhandle will be on local logistical activity.

31 Some resupply into South Vietnam and Cambodia will occur, however. Mid-March photography has shown that the new Route 103/6086 structure through the DMZ can support vehicle traffic as far south as Khe Sanh. During the rainy season in Laos this route, as well as two others extending into the DMZ are shielded by the mountains along the western DMZ boundary which effectively block most of the rain. Thus, these roads give the Communists the ability to move supplies directly into MR-1 from North Vietnam during the summer months if they so choose. In the Laos/Cambodia border area the Communist rainy season effort is facilitated by their use of waterways. During last year's rainy season, the Communists relied heavily on these to deliver substantial quantities of arms and

ammunition south into Cambodia and equally large quantities of rice (and some petroleum) north into the Laos Panhandle for consumption there or eastward delivery to South Vietnam.

32. In sum, from the viewpoint of logistics, the Communists are now in a fairly favorable position in most parts of Indochina--in GVN MRs 1 and 2, in Laos and in Cambodia. Assuming other factors provided no hindrance, they have the supplies to sustain extensive combat activities in each of these areas, though not simultaneously in both Cambodia and MRs 1 and 2 of South Vietnam.

33. In MR 3 and MR 4 of South Vietnam, the logistics situation of the Communists is less rosy. The loss of the Sihanoukville supply route is still being felt. The enemy's problems in MR 3 are substantial, but perhaps (troublesome to him) less ~~or~~ than a year ago. Despite ARVN pre-emptive operations in Cambodian areas adjacent to GVN MR 3, the Communists have had some success in sustaining small but steady supply flows into Tay Ninh Province and points farther south. Several large caches, principally foodstuffs, were seized in northwest MR 3 early this year. <sup>These</sup> ~~There~~ seizures provided limited evidence of enemy intentions to stockpile for future operations.

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34. The Communists face their most difficult problems, in terms of supplies, in MR 4. The recent surge in enemy sea infiltration attempts (14 this dry season, seven since January) attests to Communist resupply difficulties. Enemy forces in the Delta do have an overland supply link to Cambodia, but deliveries over this route must be considerably less than desired given the magnitude of the sea infiltration effort. Judging by the Communists' logistics problems, we do not foresee any significant threat from enemy main forces in this area over the next six months, although attention-getting terrorist and sapper activities are always possible.